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SUBJECT: KARZAI AND SPANTA ON FM KASURI VISIT ON JIRGAS: NO
PROGRESS

REF: ISLAMABAD 22417

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) President Karzai believes the Pakistanis are having trouble accepting the idea of large cross-border jirgas, due to their deep fear of the Pashtuns, and that we have to work to remove these fears. During his recent meeting with Pakistani FM Kasuri, Karzai did not accept the GOP proposal for a series of small jirgas on separate sides of the border, as he thinks they would have no impact on eliminating the Taliban. Karzai's approach now seems to be to push Pakistan to accept the large jirga and offer whatever guarantees Islamabad needs to do so. FM Spanta described his meeting with Kasuri as making "no progress". He described the disagreement simply: Pakistan wants to hold a series of small jirgas, while Afghanistan wants two cross-border jirgas, one on each side, with participation at both representing all Afghans and at least all Pashtuns in Pakistan (representing all Pakistan would still be better). Spanta believes Pakistan fears that by accepting the jirgas it would be tacitly acknowledging its interference in Afghan internal affairs. Their other fear is that a "Pashtunistan" concept could develop and spread in Pakistan. Afghanistan will wait a few days for the GOP response but understands the importance of continuing the conversation with Pakistan, regardless of whether the jirgas are held. According to Spanta, Karzai was "very angry" as the Pakistanis did not give "one inch" and believes the two countries have moved backwards. Nevertheless, the two sides appear ready to continue the discussion, which is beginning to get at core issues. Interestingly, neither Karzai nor Spanta made mention of any Pakistani willingness to move to a "national jirga" as described reftel. END SUMMARY

¶2. (S) President Karzai told Ambassador Neumann December 10 that Pakistani Foreign Minister Kasuri asked for a separate

meeting with Karzai and FM Spanta but with none of the Pakistani team present. Karzai said that it is apparent the Pakistanis are really afraid of the Pashtuns. They are "terrified" that the Pushtunistan and the Durand Line issues will come up. The casual observation in Islamabad by UNAMA Deputy Chris Alexander that someone is likely to raise the subject of the Durand line has reinforced GOP fears. Karzai said that, especially after the large Pashtun Jirga held in Pakistan to repudiate the Taliban, the Pakistani's are afraid of both secular and Muslim Pushtuns. Karzai also noted what he called Pakistani fears of the Pashtun and Taliban dominance in Quetta which appears quite separate from the Pakistani government presence or control. Karzai said several times that we have to work to remove Pakistani fears and persuade them that good relations with Afghanistan are in their interest.

13. (S) That said, Karzai did not accept the Pakistani notion of a series of small Jirgas. He said they would have no impact on getting rid of the Taliban. At this point, Karzai's approach seems to be to push the Pakistanis to accept the big Jirga and give them whatever guarantees they need so that their fears will not be realized. Karzai said Afghanistan would be a guarantor and that if someone raises the difficult issues, Karzai believes he can shut them down. Karzai also said that with the Pashtuns in Pakistan who are known to the Afghans, the GOA can help ensure that the Durand Line and Pashtun issues do not come up. However, Karzai said there are also others, particularly among the more radical Pashtuns, with whom Afghanistan has no contact.

14. (S) Karzai noted that the Pakistanis had turned over a document. The Afghans were working on a document (which was

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sent to the Pakistanis on December 10). Copies of both were provided by Foreign Minister Spanta and are being transmitted separately.

Meeting with FM Spanta

15. (S) Foreign Minister Spanta told Ambassador December 11 that the meeting with FM Kasuri had two parts. The first dealt with normal conversations among Foreign Ministers on trade transit, refugees, and the like. Two usually sensitive issues -- the number of Indian Consulates in Afghanistan and accusations of Afghan interference in Pakistani affairs -- did not come up. Neither did the issue of Bughti. The second part focused on the jirgas in two separate meetings (in addition to the one described by President Karzai), one with the two delegations and the other with a smaller group at the Jirga Preparatory Commission.

16. (S) Spanta said that "no progress was made", as both sides had fully different interpretations of what was agreed to in Washington. He said Kasuri believed the GOA would accept a concept similar to the North Waziristan Agreement, using smaller jirgas in different parts of Afghanistan. Pakistan's proposal was to have the tribes that are on each side of the border conduct jirgas "here and there", tribe by tribe. Spanta said Pakistan wants to hold small jirgas only in the tribal Pashtun areas of Pakistan. Kasuri suggested that Afghanistan do the same on its side. Notables from each country would also participate, Kasuri proposed.

17. (S) According to Spanta, Kasuri explained that Pakistan had no tradition of jirgas, except for the Pashtun areas, and therefore could not accept the idea of a broader national Pashtun jirga. Spanta stressed that Afghanistan's precondition for any jirga meeting was that all Pashtuns in Pakistan should have a chance to participate. Spanta summarized the disagreement -- Pakistan wants to hold a few jirgas only on the Pakistan side, while Afghanistan wants two cross-border jirgas, one on each side, with participation representing all Pashtuns in Pakistan. Spanta stressed again

there was "no consensus". Spanta said that since Kasuri was not prepared to engage on the framework of a large jirga, Spanta did not surface his fallback position of accepting national representation from Afghanistan and only Pashtun representation from Pakistan.

¶8. (S) Spanta said the GOA gave its written proposal to Pakistan on December 10. Pakistan's initial response was that it was not the idea agreed to in Washington, i.e., a national jirga outside the tribal context. The GOP counter-proposed multiple tribal meetings. Ambassador Neumann recalled his understanding was that two common jirgas was the agreement, so that each side would have a chance to host, but the size and representation was not discussed in Washington. Spanta believed that Pakistan was afraid of two things. First, Pakistan feared the actual realization of the jirgas because agreeing to hold them would indicate Pakistani acknowledgement of its interference in Afghan affairs. It was late in coming, but the GOP has now recognized this point. Second, the GOP was afraid that the concept of Pashtunistan could develop its own dynamic and spread in Pakistan. Spanta reassured the Ambassador that the GOA had no interest in this happening.

¶9. (S) In terms of next steps, Spanta said that the GOA would wait a few days for the Pakistani response to its proposal. Spanta stressed the importance of continuing the conversation with Pakistan, even though he expects much criticism if the jirgas don't materialize. He said Afghanistan would continue the intelligence exchange, economic discussions, tripartite military talks, and other bilateral exchanges regardless of what happens with the jirgas. He indicated that Afghanistan plans to be more

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focused on crisis management, for example, by discussing more proactively with the international community how to deal with the issue of interference in Afghanistan's affairs by other countries. He believes that the GOA was not active enough on that front as it was too focused on the jirgas.

¶10. (S) Spanta said that earlier he had a long conversation with the Pakistani Ambassador who fully agreed with the concept of holding two full jirgas, so he was surprised that the Pakistani side could not accept that this was the proposal agreed upon in Washington. Spanta said that President Karzai was "very angry" as he did not see "one inch" from Pakistan, and believes the two countries have moved backwards.

COMMENT

¶11. (S) The perceptions of the two sides are radically different. Some of the Afghan view derives from their belief that the jirgas need to happen soon. This is because all intelligence predicts a major Taliban offensive in the Spring/Summer controlled from Pakistan. Karzai believes the only way this can be averted or mitigated is by action in Pakistan and that the massive tribal repudiation of violence is the tool most likely to achieve the desired result. While the Pakistani proposal to work through several small tribal meetings could conceivably reach its culmination in something larger, that would not happen within the time needed to head off the summer offensive. Given the suspicious nature of the relationship, Karzai naturally assumes the worst intentions behind GOP actions. And, suspicions aside, as things now stand the offensive will come and it will be directed from inside Pakistan.

¶12. (S) The good news is that the two sides are holding detailed discussions and slowly getting to the core of their differences, which are rooted in (mis)perceptions as much as politics. The two proposals, however, need more time to play out, and the GOA's target date of January appears unlikely to be met. If different interpretations of the Washington

agreement persist, we may need to revisit with both sides the original concept and motivation that led to the agreement in Washington. Ambassador Neumann recalls that two cross-border jirgas were agreed to, in order that each side would have an opportunity to host. Meanwhile, we will continue to press the GOA to work with Islamabad on a mutually acceptable formula for the jirgas and support the GOA's willingness to continue to engage the GOP at multiple levels.

¶13. (S) Regarding reftel comment that a national jirga would include Pakistanis like MMA leader Fazel Rehman, Karzai has said explicitly that the latter should be present. END
COMMENT

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